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SPECIAL REPORT

THE POWER POSITION OF INDONESIA'S PRESIDENT SUKARNO

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THE POWER POSITION OF INDONESIA'S PRESIDENT SUKARNO

Indonesia's Sukarno has greater power today than ever before during his eighteen years as President. By carefully balancing the strength of the Communist Party against that of the army, which is anti-Communist, he maintains his own pre-eminent position and prevents these two major power factors from challenging either him or each other. Although Sukarno has permitted the Communist Party to mass impressive strength and has largely ignored national economic difficulties, neither of these problems appears to constitute an immediate threat to him.

Sources of Sukarno's Power

Sukarno's principal strength lies in his rapport with the Indonesian masses, particularly on Java, the seat of government and the home of 65 percent of the nation's 100 million people. Although the enormous support he once enjoyed may have receded somewhat, he still seems to be the national hero, the nation's great man, the symbol of the revolution which ended Dutch rule in 1949. At 63, Sukarno appears vigorous

Sukarno has been and probably still is a mass leader of extraordinary skill as well as an intuitive politician who readily grasps the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals and factions with whom he is dealing. His political skills have been a major factor in unifying the geographically sprawling archipelago, whose ethnic diversities have con-

tributed to a series of challenges to the Djakarta government--the most recent one being the Sumatra- and Celebes-based rebellion of 1958. Even many Indonesians who disagree with him continue to support him because they are convinced that he is a cohesive force essential to preserving national unity. This is particularly true of army leaders.

Sukarno's "guided democracy" --instituted between 1957 and 1960--has obviated the need for complicated political maneuver or concessions to placate and retain the support of the politically articulate. He has dissolved what was once the best organized and most vocal opposition force, the Socialist Party, as well as the largest opposition mass organization, the Masjumi. Leaders of these two groups have been in prison or under house arrest for several years. Members of the surviving Masjumi youth organization frequently come under suspicion and are arrested. Leaders of other Masjumi- and Socialist-affiliated organizations have been so coerced

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by fear of organizational dissolution or imprisonment that they have readily fallen in line with "guided democracy." The press is rigorously controlled and can be categorized only as progovernment, pro-Communist, or Communist.

The government consists of an appointed, rubber-stamp legislature, a series of advisory councils, and a cabinet that executes Sukarno's policies. There is also the National Front, an official multilevel organization ranging from an appointed national executive council to village committees. The front is supposed to represent all loyal facets of Indonesian society and to indoctrinate the people with the precepts of "guided democracy." The Communists and their front groups now hold 80 percent of the executive council seats and predominate at all other levels of the front organization. The Communist Party's pressures on Sukarno have nevertheless been exerted primarily through the party's own apparatus outside the government.

The army continues to be one of Sukarno's major props and is unlikely to make any bid for power on its own. Sukarno in the past year has largely reduced the army from an independent power factor to an arm of the executive. His first move was to lift martial law, which had been in effect since 1957 and which had considerably expanded army powers. He subsequently replaced army

commander Nasution with the more pliable General Jani, and then reduced the army's role in the cabinet.

Sukarno now has no political rivals. He has consistently blunted and diverted the careers of real or potential challengers for his position. The most recent example is that of General Nasution, who, in being promoted from army chief of staff to armed forces chief of staff, lost control of the troops and now finds his status gradually diminished.

Rise of the Communists

If Sukarno is vulnerable in any area of domestic politics, it is in his relationship with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

Sukarno's own Marxist inclinations, largely emotionally based, clearly predominate over those derived from the West or from Mohammedanism. He appears to consider Indonesian Communists as nationalists first and Communists second. His tacks away from them seem to be motivated chiefly by his fear that they are encroaching upon his power position, and not by apprehension that they are an ideological threat.

The history of Sukarno and the Communists is one of mutual exploitation. The PKI's growth from a discredited organization in 1948, when it attempted a rebellion against the government, to a major power factor ten years later can be traced largely to

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three causes: the party's united front tactics since 1951, which have included vigorous support of Sukarno; Sukarno's tolerance of the PKI's activity and acceptance of its support; and the party's good organization and unremitting hard work. Its campaign to identify itself with Sukarno provided a major means of ingratiating it with the masses.

Sukarno in turn has had to rely on the Communists because he has no effective organized political instrument of his own. There have been repeated indications that he has given non-Communist leftist organizations and individuals both encouragement and opportunity to develop a mass following, but they have failed to take full advantage of their chances. For the most part, leaders of such groups have had little knack for organization and no interest in sustained effort at the rice-roots level.

The PKI today claims a membership of 2.5 million. This figure seems credible. In addition it numbers among its front groups a peasant organization of a claimed 7 million members, a labor federation of 3.5 million, and a youth group of 1.5 million. According to party Chairman Aidit, the PKI is organized in every Indonesian province except West New Guinea, in 93 percent of the subprovincial areas, and 62 percent of the villages.

PKI Support Questioned

Dissension among the PKI's leadership as to the wisdom of

supporting Sukarno appears to have diminished. For several years, a militant group reportedly chafed at the contradiction of party strength and party subservience to Sukarno. A compromise may have been reached about a year ago whereby PKI support for Sukarno would be further qualified, the party would press with greater zeal its own limited objectives, and it would generally attempt a more militant position. Although the Communists apparently regard Sukarno with contempt in their inner circles, in public they still refer to him with respect and deference.

The PKI's attempts through its labor union affiliates to take over British interests in mid-January are an example of the more militant approach. Although the army published an earlier presidential proclamation that there were to be no seizures unless Sukarno so directed, token interference by the Communists continued in many areas and serious harassment in others. On 2 February Djakarta announced the extension of "government supervision" to those enterprises where the unions had taken action. The effect of this announcement is still unclear. Although there may have been collusion between the PKI and Sukarno, appearances are that the Communists acted independently.

However, the Communists, including the militants, appear unready to attempt any major challenge of Sukarno. They are aware that he still enjoys mass

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support in Java; they fear that a confrontation with the army would follow a definite challenge to him and probably believe that the party is unprepared for armed conflict; and they note that the direction of Sukarno's policies, both domestically and internationally, for the most part, favors Communist interests.

Economic Problems

The dangers in Indonesia's economic trouble may lie less in their purely economic aspects than in the potential for Communist exploitation. Sukarno does not understand and prefers to ignore economic matters; his policies--pursued primarily for political reasons--have often aggravated economic problems.

Indonesia's economy has the classic weaknesses of the underdeveloped nation: exports dependent on world prices of a few key products (rubber, oil, tin, and copra); a lack of trained economic, financial, managerial, and technical personnel; and a poorly educated rank and file that cannot be readily diverted to new pursuits. The transportation and distribution system among and within the islands is either inadequate or in disrepair, the pressure of population on food supplies is growing, and underproduction is chronic. Indonesia has to import over one million tons of rice annually. Poor distribution and military stockpiling often create shortages where there need be none. The results have been severe inflation, dwindling

foreign reserves, and a chronic budgetary deficit. Economic development has depended entirely on foreign aid.

Even with substantial aid from both the West and the bloc, development plans have been slow in materializing, and implementation of projects has been meager. The takeover of Dutch and Chinese enterprises in 1957 and 1958 created dislocations from which the economy has yet to recover. Moreover, the few senior Indonesian officials trained in economics or related subjects received their education in the West, and their policies frequently have been politically unacceptable to Sukarno and his advisers. Still another difficulty is that the younger people who have been trained more recently in economics or administration are largely drawn into the government bureaucracy, where their talents are not directly productive for the economy.

Indonesia's present state of inflation and depleted reserves--an intensification of a situation chronic since independence--has been caused by the program of massive arms purchases from the bloc, the internal dislocations brought about by the military build-up in 1961 and 1962 against West New Guinea, and now the strains caused by the policy of confrontation of Malaysia.

Confrontation Consequences

The decision to cease trade with Malaysia--which thereby

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excluded the use of Singapore as a transshipping point--has created a temporary vacuum in segments of Indonesian commerce. Of far greater significance, however, was the withdrawal last September of the International Monetary Fund and certain Western nations from a proposed stabilization plan, which envisaged the extension of some \$300 million in direct financial assistance, other economic aid, and debt rescheduling. Indonesian financial measures announced last May as necessary components of the plan have been partially abandoned.

Djakarta has relieved some pressures by rescheduling its debt payments to the USSR and by arranging partial payment in commodities. Imports are severely limited. Additional relief will come with substantial bonus payments Indonesia is scheduled to receive from the oil companies this year.

The impact of the economic dislocation is reduced by the fact that 80 percent of the population is engaged in a subsistence peasant economy. The full force of inflation therefore does not hit the peasant as it does the urban worker. For the most part the Indonesians appear to have passively accepted economic stringency and tightened their belts.

In urban and wage-earning areas, however, irritation over

belt-tightening is more readily aroused and has been manifested in demonstrations against conspicuous signs of affluence--automobiles, large houses, etc. Anti-Chinese riots last May in cities of West Java apparently were motivated partly by dissatisfaction with economic hardships. These were not Communist inspired, however, and were easily controlled. Currently the seasonal rice shortage is causing some concern to the government, and the Communists are circulating apparently exaggerated reports of starvation conditions in Java.

Without Sukarno's persistent diversionary campaigns and the controls afforded by "guided democracy," economic problems probably would create severe political difficulties for him. For the time being, however, the country still seems able to absorb or to forget its gamut of economic problems, and Sukarno's position is relatively unaffected.

Outlook

Sukarno's assets continue to outweigh his liabilities. Although his problems will accumulate and intensify, he will probably meet them in the foreseeable future with continued careful domestic maneuver and attempts to divert attention to international affairs.

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The PKI's immediate strategy apparently is to move with Sukarno, pressuring him when possible, and avoiding any major exploitation of the economic situation. The party is concentrating on building a stronger peasant base and on gaining genuine representation in the cabinet.

Should either his own inclinations or Communist pressures

lead Sukarno to appoint Communists to the cabinet--as he professes he will do--the PKI could go far toward consolidating its position through its predominance in the National Front and its strength among labor and the peasantry. Any decline in Sukarno's health or rise in the Communists' capability to confront the army will hasten the day when they feel able to challenge the President himself.

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